

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE PRIORITY

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TAGS: SOPN, SWEL, PGOV, HA

SUBJECT: JACK ANDERSON COLUMN ON HAITI

1. FOLLOWING IS FULL TEXT OF ARTICLE ENTITLED "A VIEW OF THE DARK SIDE OF HAITI" IN JACK ANDERSON/LES WHITTEN COLUMN WHICH APPEARED IN AUGUST 3 WASHINGTON POST:

2. QUOTE LIKE THE MOON, HAITI PRESENTS ITS BRIGHT SIDE TO THE WORLD. BUT IT ALSO HAS A DARK, UNSEEN SIDE WHICH IT TRIES TO HIDE FROM THE WORLD.

3. THE GOVERNMENT DISCOURAGES REPORTERS FROM VISITING THE MOST BLEAK AREAS, WHERE THE PEASANTS ARE STARVING WHILE THEIR RULERS FEAST. FOREIGN REPORTERS, WHO HAVE VENTURED TOO FAR, HAVE BEEN HUSTLED OUT OF THE COUNTRY.

4. ONE BOLD, HAITIAN REPORTER, GASSNER RAYMOND, DARED TO WRITE A STORY CRITICIZING THE GOVERNMENT. TWO WEEKS LATER, HIS BODY WAS FOUND IN A DITCH.

5. WE SENT OUR ROVING REPORTER, HAL BERNTON, TO THE TINY, MOUNTAINOUS CARIBBEAN NATION TO SEEK OUT THE STORIES THAT

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THE GOVERNMENT WOULD LIKE TO SUPPRESS. POSING AS AN

INTINERANT STUDENT, HE TRAVELED WITH A KNAPSACK ON HIS BACK INTO THE FORBIDDEN AREA.

6. BERNTON BEGAN HIS INVESTIGATION IN PORT-AU-PRINCE, THE BRIGHT SIDE OF HAITI, WHERE TOURISTS LOLL IN ELEGANT HOTELS, DRINK COOL GLASSES OF RUM PUNCH AND DANCE IN SLEEK DISCOTHEQUES.

7. BUT IF HAITI IS A TROPICAL PARADISE FOR THE FOREIGN TOURISTS, IT IS A LAND OF LUXURY FOR THE RULING CLASS. THEY ARE DOMINATED BY THE AMAZING DUVALIER FAMILY, WHICH HAS AMASSED A PIRATE'S FORTUNE SINCE THE LATE "PAPA DOC" DUVALIER SEIZED POWER IN 1958.

8. HIS PLACE HAS NOW BEEN TAKEN BY HIS 24-YEAR-OLD SON, JEAN-CLAUDE DUVALIER, MORE AFFECTIONATELY KNOWN AS "BABY DOC," WHO GOVERNS UNDER THE WATCHFUL, MATERNAL EYE OF HIS MOTHER, "MAMON SIMONE" DUVALIER.

9. THEY IMPOSE A SPECIAL TAX ON NEARLY ALL THE PRINCIPAL GOODS THE IMPOVERISHED NATION PRODUCES. THE MONEY GOES INTO THE ROYAL TREASURY FOR THE DUVALIERS TO SPEND AS THEY PLEASE. SOURCES WHO HAVE KEPT TABS ON THE FAMILY ESTIMATE THAT THE DUVALIERS HAVE STASHED OVER \$200 MILLION IN SWISS BANKS. "WE ARE PAINFULLY AWARE," A U.S. OFFICIAL TOLD BERNTON, "THAT'S IT'S THE LITTLE FARMERS WHO HAVE PROVIDED THE FUNDS TO PAVE THE STREETS OF PORT-AU-PRINCE."

10. THE OPPRESSED PEASANTS ALSO HAVE PAID FOR A FLEET OF 10 SLEEK AUTOMOBILES IN WHICH "BABY DOC" RIDES OVER THE PAVED STREETS. SOMETIMES HE SCATTERS MONEY TO THE APPRECIATIVE CROWDS. THE FAMILY ALSO OWNS NUMEROUS VILLAS SCATTERED AROUND THE COUNTRY.

11. FROM THE BRIGHT LIGHTS AND PLUSH HOTELS OF PORT-AU-PRINCE, REPORTER BERNTON HEADED WITH HIS KNAPSACK INTO THE NORTHWEST SECTION OF HAITI. HE SOUGHT DIRECTIONS FROM MISSIONARIES, SOCIAL WORKERS AND OTHERS FAMILIAR WITH THE HINTERLAND. THEY WARNED HIM THAT THE HAITIAN MILITARY WOULD STOP HIM FROM ENTERING THE AREA.

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12. NEVERTHELESS, BERNTON CLIMBED ABOARD A COLORFULLY PAINTED NATIVE BUS AND PERCHED HIMSELF ON THE ROOF FOR THE JOLTING, ALL-DAY RIDE UP THE ISLAND. THE OPULENCE OF PORT-AU-PRINCE QUICKLY FADED INTO STARK POVERTY.

13. ALONGSIDE THE DUSTY ROAD WERE CLUSTERS OF MUD-WALLED HOUSES, WITH ROOFS OF PALM FRONDS. YOUNG CHILDREN, WITH THE THIN ARMS AND SWOLLEN BELLIES THAT BETRAY MALNUTRITION,

STOOD NAKED IN THE DUST. SOME STARED SULLENLY; OTHERS SHOUTED GREETINGS.

14. HAITI IS THE POOREST NATION IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE. BERNTON MADE HIS WAY INTO ITS POOREST REGION. HE HIKE THE LAST 10 MILES TO AN ISOLATED VILLAGE. ALONG THE WAY, HE PASSED THROUGH A DESOLATE LAND OF CHARCOALED TREE STUMPS. THE TREES HAD BEEN FELLED BY NATIVES, THE HARD WOOD BURNED INTO CHARCOAL FOR FUEL. AMONG THE BLACKENED STUMPS WERE EVEN MORE STARK THICKETS OF CACTUS.

15. WITHOUT VEGETATION TO STOP THE EROSION, RAIN TORRENTS HAD CARVED DEEP GULLIES INTO THE BARREN TERRAIN. THE SWIRLING WATER HAD WASHED AWAY THE SOIL, LEAVING ONLY EXPOSED ROCKS.

16. THE LAND HAD ALSO BEEN BAKED BY TWO SUMMERS OF DROUGHT. YET THE HAITIAN GOVERNMENT HAD REFUSED AT FIRST TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE DROUGHT AND HAD LATER BARRED U.S. VOLUNTARY AGENCIES FROM BRINGING IN FREE CLOTHING. THIS MIGHT HAVE COMPETED WITH THE THRIVING USED CLOTHING BUSINESS THAT DUVALIER'S FRIENDS OPERATE IN PORT-AU-PRINCE.

17. BERNTON WAS EXHAUSTED WHEN HE REACHED THE VILLAGE. THE DIRT-POOR VILLAGERS BROUGHT HIM RIPE MANGOES TO EAT. HE WAS TAKEN IN BY A FARM FAMILY, WHO LIVED IN A SMALL THATCHED HUT ATOP A BARREN KNOLL.

18. THE FARMER TRIED TO SCRATCH A LIVING FROM A SMALL PLOT WATERED BY A TINY CREEK. "THIS YEAR, THE RAIN HAS NOT COME," THE FARMER SAID. "WE WORK SO HARD. AND ALL FOR NOTHING. MANY OF THE CHILDREN ARE WEAK. EACH MONTH, WE REPLANT OUR LAND. BUT THERE IS NO RAIN. NOTHING GROWS." UNCLASSIFIED

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19. TO ESCAPE STARVATION, MANY PEOPLE ALREADY HAVE LEFT THE REGION. SOME SET OUT DANGEROUSLY IN FLIMSY LITTLE SAILBOATS, HOPING TO REACH THE BAHAMAS. OTHERS MADE THE HARD TREK TO PORT-AU-PRINCE, WITH FAINT HOPE OF FINDING WORK.

20. THE VILLAGE LEADER TOOK BERNTON ON A TOUR OF THE AREA. "THE PEOPLE'S SITUATION IS CRITICAL," HE SAID. "THE MANGO HARVEST IS NEARLY FINISHED, AND THERE WILL SOON BE NOTHING LEFT TO EAT."

21. THE CHILDREN, THEIR HAIR TURNED TO A RUST COLOR BY MALNUTRITION, USUALLY SQUATTED IN FRONT OF THEIR HUTS. THEY WERE TOO WEAK TO RUN AND PLAY. UNQUOTE. KISSINGER

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